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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PANAMA 1658

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SUBJ:THE CONFERENCE OF TLATELOLCO -
A PANAMANIAN PERSPECTIVE

REF: STATE 047899

SUMMARY: THE PANAMANIAN REACTION TO THE TLATELOLCO CONFERENCE HAS BEEN ONE OF SATISFACTION WITH THE SUPPORT EXPRESSED FOR ITS CANAL TREATY POSITION AND CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM THAT THE MEETING REPRESENTED THE BEGINNING OF A NEW U S APPROACH TO LATIN AMERICA. WHILE RESIDUAL SUSPICION OF U S INTENTIONS HAS FLAVORED REACTIONS, THE PREDOMINATING HOPE IS THAT A NEW BASIS FOR HEMISPHERIC RELATIONS IS EMERGING, ONE WHICH WILL BRING WITH IT DEEDS AS WELL AS DIALOGUE. LOOKING AHEAD TO WASHINGTON AND ATLANTA, PANAMA CAN BE EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN ITS RELATIVE LOW PROFILE ON THE CANAL QUESTION WHILE CONTINUING ITS PRACTICE OF ALIGNING ITSELF WITH OUR PRINCIPAL PROTAGONISTS ON OTHER ISSUES. OVER THE LONG HAUL, THE EARNEST OF THE SPIRIT OF TLATELOLCO FOR PANAMA WILL BE THE SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF A NEW CANAL TREATY. WELL AWARE THAT IN THE CANAL ISSUE IT HAS PERHAPS THE MOST VISIBLE AND EMOTIONAL POLITICAL ISSUE IN THE HEMISPHERE, PANAMA CAN ALSO BE EXPECTED TO PORTRAY
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ITS SETTLEMENT AS THE TRUEST TEST OF THE U.S.'S SINCERITY

IN SEEKING A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH LATIN AMERICA. SHOULD THE NEGOTIATIONS GO SOUR, SUCH A TACTIC COULD JEOPARDIZE OUR EFFORTS TO PUT OUR HEMISPHERIC RELATIONS ON A NEW FOOTING, AND TO THAT EXTENT, TLATELOLCO HAS ADDED A NEW DIMENSION TO THE CANAL NEGOTIATIONS. END SUMMARY

1. REACTION IN PANAMA TO THE CONFERENCE OF TLATELOLCO HAS BEEN ONE OF SATISFACTION WITH THE SUPPORT EXPRESSED FOR ITS CANAL POSITION AND MEASURED OPTIMISM THAT THE MEETING MARKED THE BEGINNING OF A NEW U S APPROACH TO LATIN AMERICA WHILE THE BROADER RANGE OF HEMISPHERIC RELATIONS IS OF CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE TO THE GOP, IT IS THE CANAL ISSUE WHICH COMMANDS ITS PRIMARY ATTENTION AND IS THE PRISM THROUGH WHICH IT TENDS TO ASSESS ITS INTERESTS AND POLICIES. TLATELOLCO WAS NO EXCEPTION, AND ALTHOUGH PANAMA PUSHED ITS VIEWS ON SUCH MATTERS AS THE OAS AND LATIN AMERICAN UNITY -- AND THE LOCAL PRESS FOCUSED ITS COMMENTARY ON THE LARGER QUESTIONS OF U S INTENTIONS AND HEMISPHERIC RELATIONS -- THE PRINCIPAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONFERENCE FOR THE GOP WAS ITS SUPPORT FOR A PROMPT AND JUST SOLUTION TO THE CANAL DISPUTE. THIS WAS AN IMPORTANT ENDORSEMENT FOR PANAMA, FOR IT OFFICIALLY PUT THE INTER-AMERICAN COMMUNITY CLEARLY ON RECORD.

2. FOREIGN MINISTER TACK WENT TO MEXICO CITY WITH THE GOP STILL RIDING SOMEWHAT ON AN EMOTIONAL HIGH AS A RESULT OF THE AGREEMENT ON PRINCIPLES AND SECRETARY KISSINGER'S FEBRUARY 7 VISIT. PANAMA WAS SATISFIED WITH THE PROGRESS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS, ENCOURAGED BY THE HIGH LEVEL ATTENTION THEY WERE RECEIVING AND PLEASED THAT THE SECRETARY HAD CHOSEN PANAMA AS THE FIRST LATIN COUNTRY TO VISIT SINCE ASSUMING OFFICE. PANAMANIAN LEADERS HAD BEEN DEEPLY IMPRESSED BY THE SECRETARY'S DIRECTNESS AND PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO SUCCESSFUL NEGOTIATIONS AND HAD THE BENEFIT OF A PREVIEW, AS IT WERE, OF HIS CONCEPTUAL AND PRACTICAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM OF RENEWING THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE U S AND LATIN AMERICA. IN MANY RESPECTS, THEREFORE, TLATELOLCO WAS AN ANTI-CLIMACTIC GATHERING FOR PANAMA, AND IT WAS CLEAR BEFORE IT OCCURRED THAT THE GOP HAD NO INTENTION OF DISRUPTING THE PRESENT EXCELLENT

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NEGOTIATING ATMOSPHERE BY AGGRESSIVE INITIATIVES AT THE CONFERENCE. THAT IT WAS SATISFIED WITH THE WAY THE CANAL ISSUE WAS HANDLED HAS BEEN EVIDENT IN OUR CONVERSATIONS HERE, AS WAS THE FACT THAT TACK WAS AGAIN IMPRESSED WITH THE SECRETARY'S WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE THE ISSUES FRANKLY AND WITH UNDERSTANDING AND GOODWILL. IF NOTHING ELSE, MEXICO CITY FURTHER REASSURED THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF OUR COMMITMENT TO RESOLVING THE CANAL ISSUE.

3. MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE CONFERENCE WAS EXTENSIVE, ALTHOUGH UNDERSTANDABLY LESS INTENSE THAN THAT ACCORDED THE SECRETARY'S VISIT TO PANAMA. EDITORIAL COMMENT, MOST NOTICEABLY IN GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED MATUTINO AND EL PANAMA AMERICANO FOCUSED LARGELY ON EXAMINING THE "NEW DIALOGUE" IN TERMS OF PAST U S POLICIES TOWARD THE HEMISPHERE AND PRESENT REALITIES. WHILE A FEBRUARY 22 EL PANAMA AMERICANO EDITORIAL TERMED THE CONFERENCE A FAILURE AND TOOK A SWIP AT WHAT IT CALLED THE SECRETARY'S "VERBALISM" AND ATTEMPTS TO "DIVIDE THE UNITY THAT LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES SHOULD HAVE WHEN NEGOTIATING WITH THE U S," SUBSEQUENT MATUTINO EDITORIALS FEBRUARY 23 AND MARCH 1 STRUCK A MORE POSITIVE TONE. ALTHOUGH MATUTINO ALSO WAS SUSPICIOUS OF ANY NEW SLOGANS AND REFLECTED SKEPTICISM REGARDING U S INTENTIONS -- CALLING THE NEW DIALOGUE BASICALLY AN ATTEMPT TO CONSOLIDATE NORTH AMERICAN DOMINATION .. THROUGH THE USE OF GENERAL SOLUTIONS FOR EXISTING PROBLEMS" -- IT OBSERVED THAT THE STATED U S GOALS CAN BE VIEWED AS "PROMISES TO BE FULFILLED." THE MEETING'S SUCCESS, ACCORDING TO MATUTINO, WAS DUE TO A "NEW AWAKENING" OF LATIN UNITY WHICH THE SECRETARY RECOGNIZED AND IN FUTURE MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT. THERE WAS A GENERAL CONSENSUS IN ALL COMMENTARY THAT THE PROPOSED "NEW DIALOGUE" MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY APPROPRIATE ACTIONS FOR, AS MATUTINO PUT IT, "THIS TIME THE PEOPLE EXPECT POSITIVE RESULTS, FOR LATIN AMERICA CANNOT AFFORD ANOTHER FAILURE." THIS BLEND OF HOPEFULNESS AND RESIDUAL SUSPICION -- TOGETHER WITH A WAIT-AND-SEE PRAGMATISM -- HAS ALSO BEEN THE PREDOMINANT REACTION OF MOST INDIVIDUAL PANAMANIANS. WE HAVE BEEN TOLD BY A FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL THAT OPINION AMONG HIS COLLEAGUES IS DIVIDED BETWEEN THOSE WHO REMAIN UNCONVINCED THAT THERE HAS BEEN A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN THE U S APPROACH TO THE HEMISPHERE AND THOSE

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WHO WERE HOPEFUL THAT MEXICO CITY HAD BROUGHT ABOUT AT LEAST THE BEGINNING OF SUCH A CHANGE. THE FEELING OBVIOUSLY IS, IN ANY CASE, THAT HAVING TAKEN THE INITIATIVE FOR CHANGE, IT IS BASICALLY UP TO THE U S TO FOLLOW THROUGH.

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4. ANOTHER INTERESTING FACET OF THE GOP'S HANDLING OF ITS ROLE AT TLATELOLCO WAS THE MANNER IN WHICH IT EXPLOITED THE PROMINENCE IT HAS ACHIEVED FROM THE CANAL DISPUTE TO ASSERT ITS INFLUENCE WITHIN THE LATIN COMMUNITY AND TO PROMOTE ITS IMAGE AT HOME. MUCH HAS BEEN MADE BY THE LOCAL PRESS OF THE FACT THAT THE CENTRAL AMERICAN FOREIGN MINISTERS TRAVELLED TO MEXICO CITY ABOARD TORRIJOS' PERSONAL AIRCRAFT, AND THE CONCLUSION HAS BEEN MORE THAN SUGGESTED THAT TACK SERVED NOT ONLY AS THEIR HOST BUT AS THEIR SPOKESMAN. THIS DESIRE TO PARLAY ITS CREDENTIALS AS A SMALL NATION CONFRONTING THE AMERICAN GIANT INTO A GREATER VOICE IN REGIONAL AND HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS IS UNDERSTANDABLE, AND IT IS PART OF THE REASON WHY PANAMA WILL CONTINUE TO LEAN TOWARD THIRD WORLD POSITIONS AND TO BE OUR PROTAGONIST IN FUTURE DEBATES ON THE NATURE AND SPECIFICS OF THE NEW SPECIAL U.S.-LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP.

5. LOOKING AHEAD, PANAMA CAN BE EXPECTED TO MAINTAIN ITS RELATIVE SILENCE ON THE CANAL QUESTION IN WASHINGTON AND ATLANTA, ALTHOUGH IT WILL BE AS ALWAYS EXTREMELY SENSITIVE TO ANY INDICATIONS THAT THE CANAL ISSUE HAS SLIPPED IN OUR SCALE OF PRIORITIES OR THAT THE U.S. HAS BEGUN TO TAKE PANAMANIAN SATISFACTION FOR GRANTED. AT THE SAME TIME, BEING EVER MINDFUL OF MAINTAINING ITS "REVOLUTIONARY" CONFIDENTIAL

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CREDIBILITY, PANAMA'S DELEGATIONS WILL JOIN--BUT NOT LEAD--THE ASSAULT ON THE OAS AND IN QUESTIONING THE MOTIVES AND MECHANICS OF OUR IDEAS ON SUCH MATTERS AS GLOBAL ISSUE COORDINATION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT. AS LONG AS THE CANAL ISSUE REMAINS UNRESOLVED, THE GOP CLEARLY

PERCEIVES IT AS IN ITS INTEREST TO BE IDENTIFIED WITH THE CHIEF PROTAGONISTS OF THE U.S. ON THESE ISSUES, AND IT IS ONLY BECAUSE OF THE PROGRESS REGISTERED BY OUR TREATY NEGOTIATORS THAT THE PANAMANIAN WILL BE MORE RESTRAINED THAN WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN THE CASE.

6. LOOKING YET FARTHER DOWN THE ROAD, WE BELIEVE THAT WHILE U.S. FOLLOW-THROUGH IN OTHER AREAS WILL INFLUENCE ITS ASSESSMENT OF OUR INTENTIONS TOWARD LATIN AMERICA, FOR PANAMA THE EARNEST OF THE SPIRIT OF TLAHELCO WILL BE THE SUCCESS OF THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS IN REACHING AGREEMENT ON A MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY NEW CANAL TREATY. WELL AWARE THAT IT HAS IN THE CANAL DISPUTE PERHAPS THE SINGLE MOST VISIBLE AND EMOTIONAL POLITICAL ISSUE IN THE HEMISPHERE, THE GOP CAN BE EXPECTED--SHOULD THE NEGOTIATIONS FALTER--TO INCREASINGLY PORTRAY ITS SETTLEMENT AS THE ACID TEST OF THE U.S.'S SINCERITY IN SEEKING A TRULY NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH LATIN AMERICA. TO THE EXTENT SUCH A TACTIC COULD JEOPARDIZE OUR EFFORTS TO PUT OUR HEMISPHERIC RELATIONS ON A NEW FOOTING, TLAHELCO HAS STRENGTHENED PANAMA'S HAND AND HAS ADDED A NEW DIMENSION TO THE NEGOTIATIONS.

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